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RECENT SPECULATIONS UPON IMMORTALITY.

BY LOUISE COLLIER WILLCOX.

WHENEVER the flood of life is at the full, then, too, the sense of death is most copious. It is not the sluggish nor the half-alert who, in all the inevitable round of hourly changes, feels the looming shadow of the ultimate passing as it approaches. Rather is it he who in every nerve is alive who feels most keenly the trickling by of the hours, and who strives to hold at bay the great Invader, lingering like a child upon the shore eager to cast one last pebble before the sun goes down.

The Elizabethan and the Victorian eras, both periods of resplendent vitality, have been notably preoccupied with the sense of death. If they of the earlier time sowed broadcast more magnificent and enlightening phrases, we of the later may at least claim to have been more impartial, more eager, if by any means it might be accomplished, to come at some glimmering of exact truth. The contemplative descriptions of the Elizabethan period have become treatises, in which, from all the known data of the world, men have endeavored to plummet the ocean of the unknown. The method only is different. The poets then were as eager as the scientists are now to fathom the meaning of the strange contradiction of life. The pity and terror of death, its mystery and its liberation, haunted them. Nowhere more strikingly set down is the whole awe of it than in Ferdinand's short speech over the body of his dead sister, killed by his own rapacious cruelty:

"Cover her face; mine eyes dazzle; she died young."

The solitude, the breaking off with all sweet customs of life, with "youth, strength, pleasure, people, time, nay reason"; its gruesomeness, "so full of fearful shadows"; its dis-

gust, "to lie in cold obstruction and to rot," this sensibly warm motion to become "a kneaded clod," "to be imprisoned in the viewless winds, and blown with restless violence about the pendent world,"—all these aspects of our evanescence haunted the imagination even as now, and at times the sense of it touched those buoyant people with a world-weariness fit to belong to the nineteenth century.

"'Tis less than to be born, a lasting sleep;
A quiet resting from all jealousy."

"It is but giving over of a game
That must be lost."

There were then, as well, those who took the scientific path and examined closely, like Sir Thomas Browne, into the minutiae of death, modes of burial, the uses of the ashes of dead bodies, the significance and derivation of the rites performed, the contradiction of the human state where the flowing present and the imperfect image of the past are man's only possession and the future an impenetrable veil, and who found in the end that nothing was immortal but immortality, that elaborate burial was but a futile antic, that the strongest monuments crumble, and that a man has nothing to lean upon but his own faith. Drummond of Hawthornden, too, in his "Cypress Grove," strolled in meditative leisure over the whole ground; he argued the existence of the soul from those incomprehensible powers in this life that forecast disasters, see apparitions and give signs, feel secret foreknowledge and presagings. He offers it as solace that, as we do not despair in the evils of life seeing that Providence overcomes them, neither should we despair in the last and greatest of evils, death. Birth, he tells us, is a mysterious change, no less than death; all things have their season and then perish; human honors and delights are empty; desire is futile and self-deceptive; and, finally, he points out how intolerable a creature a man would be, were he not mortal, were it not for the continual renewing of the species on the earth, and for the dignity and tragedy with which his necessary passing invests each man. He, too, ends the whole matter on the note of faith:

"This world is as a cabinet to God, in which the small things (however to us hid and secret) are nothing less kept than the great. For as He was wise and powerful to create, so doth His knowledge com-

prehend His own creation. . . . Not any atom of the scattered dust of mankind, tho' daily flowing under new forms, is to Him unknown; and His knowledge doth distinguish and discern what once His power shall awake and raise up. . . . That time doth approach in which the dead shall live and the living be changed, and of all actions the guerdon is at hand."

It is interesting to note that but little progress has been made since then. The centuries have passed, and practically little more is to be said to-day upon man's problematic future. Nearly every form of modern speculation has been forecast. Greater stress is laid in our days upon knowing the self and definitely making up one's mind as to what it is that is to be perpetuated. Only a well-knit personality, and one of definite outline, is perceptible against the shifting scenery of this world. The journey to ourselves is far to make and difficult. As in Atalanta's race, the ground is strewn with golden apples, and an irresistible desire to stoop and possess the fruits of the earth conquers us. It is all too easy to lose sight of that dazzling darkness toward which we journey. Plunging our whole being into life, consumed by the sense of generation, death, regeneration, we become of the very stuff of mortality and mutability; we miss our chance to sound the depths of consciousness, to find the point of stability and maintain the victor's attitude in the face of the everlasting flux. Life, once despoiled of its decorative garments, wavers between two points, the effort of philosophy to know and the effort of religion to feel. By one or the other of these, a man must hold himself still in a whirling universe, must learn to realize himself and possess his soul. Michael Angelo, self-centred as few men have ever been, complained at the last that on numbering over his days he could not find one which had belonged to himself. Subtract from life the time given to things bodily, sleep, food, exercise and the accumulation of money, and the time given to things casual, intercourse, public duties and pleasures, external observances and vain dissipation of energy, and the portion of life left for that solitary journey to ourselves is indeed scant. Chateaubriand once said: "Happiness is to be ignorant of self, and to arrive at death without ever having felt one's self live." But this is an exact contradiction of the truth. If it were true, the achievement of a violet would be greater than the achievement of Socrates. But the truth is, happiness is ful-

ness of being, and consists in that knowledge of self which feels its own stability, its resistance to the mutability about it.

Modern literature has strained after many ways of extending and intensifying personality. Barrés, the aggressive French individualist, so representative of his class, has recommended the means of pride and of domination, totally overlooking the fact that by relations only is this life enriched. Life for him is an opportunity for pillage and booty. He vivifies all nature, adorns the memory by strange sights and sounds, courting the quickening power of unaccustomed experiences and hours,—the evening when all the flowers take on color, when contours stand out, everything lives anew and glows into speech. He seems to endow nature with spirit and an articulate organism; history he uses to extend the personality across the ages, and to incite himself to keener humility and higher pride than may belong to the single individual. Beauty, beauty ever flowing, vanishing away as we look, is to him an incitement to grasp with deeper and keener sensibility the moment of life. It is the same tendency that leads Pater to warn us, in the Conclusion to the “*Renaissance*,” to force every instant to yield up its guerdon of quickened sensibilities and multiplied consciousness, to care for the quality of the moment as it flies; it is the same warning iterated and reiterated throughout Goethe, and which makes inevitably for the high experience of the true humanist.

This is the attitude toward life with which Mr. Santayana* is most closely allied. In his “*Reason in Religion*,” he gives us that incisive and clean-cut representation of life which is the fruit of the penetrating power of the critical intelligence devoid of the smelting and fusing power of a spiritual experience. Mr. Santayana’s plea is that the categories of reason should be applied to every department of life, and that mortality thus lifted to its highest powers would make the here and the now its own sufficient and completed reward. He is concerned to show that there is not, and never has been, any other revelation than that of the slow development of human reason. The Christian Epic, dried out and rationalized by him, loses its glow and inspiration, and it is obvious that thus presented it would cease to be a great moving power.

* “*The Life of Reason—Vol. III—Reason in Religion*,” by George Santayana. Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1905.

That religion teaches and has always taught by symbols and not by facts Mr. Santayana truly enough emphasizes, and that literal interpretation can belong only to the elementary intelligence. But where Mr. Santayana is hardly emphatic enough is in not laying stress upon the fact that who delves beneath the symbol for significance comes ultimately at a truth unfailingly vital to man in all ages. It is true enough that the average heaven presented by the old promises is no longer alluring. The heaven of the Old Testament, the city inside four walls, with its streets of gold, jewel-set portals, and its unrelieved Jewish glitter and hardness, means very little now. Modern religion can offer us no descriptive heaven which would be accepted by the sophisticated consciousness. The gold and silver and gems of the Old Testament would be comfortable only to the Jews; and the well-watered gardens where Mohammed lounges drinking sherbets and transfixed by the glances of lovely maidens "all innocence and fire," with which Mr. Santayana mirthfully expresses himself as satisfied, leave the present writer utterly untouched. The very presence of Mohammed and the gazellelike maidens, who somehow suggest a troop of giggling and unripe schoolgirls, would make it uninhabitable. As for Nirvana, that has the virtue of being vague, but it is too empty to be a real incitement to effort. The meeting again of friends in an infinity of love and bliss, which is the heaven treasured by many affectionate hearts, fails too and has its own element of crudity. In the first place, human beings are precious to us by virtue of their limitations and our own. They are dear because they share our burdens, or because in an indifferent and unlistening world they understand the secret tortures of our suffering, or because they accept our care and affection, and feel our existence as an alleviation of their own ills, and thus furnish us with an added reason for being. They are, too, the dearer for the very fact of their evanescence. All love foresees loss and suffering. All love clings closer because we foretaste and tremble at the dawning division. In a world where there was no suffering, no prospect of change or loss or alienation, it would seem the emotions would be greatly diminished, or, at any rate, so unself-conscious as hardly to be reckoned among the joys of existence. So that there is little to fall back upon and cling to outside of the golden and mystic utterance of Christ: "In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so"

—if, indeed, death and despair were the final word upon human life—"I would have told you." And it comes closely linked with the command to overcome the world and its tribulations, to establish the soul's poise upon a definite trust in the unrevealed, eternal issues; for, being of a generation as yet unable to accept and put into practice what we have of earthly truth, we cannot expect heavenly revelations. Doubtless there is much in Herbert Spencer's suggestion that there is probably a "mode of being as much transcending intelligence and will as these transcend mere mechanical motion."

One point made by Mr. Santayana, and one too rarely noted, is the tendency of dogmatic religion to become, by reason perhaps of its very concreteness, a mere *détour* from, and return to, the path of worldliness. Upon this rock the Roman church shattered, and upon this again the Protestant sects are breaking and becoming mainly philanthropic organizations, infinitely helpful to democracy and to the forging of the links of human brotherhood, but losing more and more the element of devotional worship, and the power of bringing the soul into communion with its Creator. Philosophy and mysticism, being abstract and meditative, seem to hold these clues, and the churches which admit them will have the strongest hold over mankind.

In his treatment of mysticism as a function of the elementary consciousness or as a momentary disintegration of the trained consciousness, Mr. Santayana has fallen short. The mystic sense, like the truly religious sense, is an inner experience and one not to be disproved by the outsider and the uninitiate. Mr. Santayana's *dicta* upon this head have only the value of the vision of a blind man, or of a dissertation upon love by a professor who has been so absorbed in pedagogics that he has never had time or impulse to feel, and has only carefully classified and labelled the phenomena of the great passion.

But, when all is said, Mr. Santayana has given us a valuable contribution to modern analyses of religious motives, not so much because he has built up any very satisfying theory, as because with keen and concise logic, and that austere classicism which marks both his expression and his mode of thought, he has laid bare unworthy and unbalanced theories. His constructive work is entirely confined to showing that, the categories of reason applied to life, and the daily course guided by a high and trained in-

telligence (a gift, alas! not to be had for the asking, though Mr. Santayana seems to overlook this obvious fact), life here and now may, indeed will, be its own reward.

Dr. Saleeby,* though a Spencerian and an evolutionist, and as distant as possible in method from Mr. Santayana, yet arrives at practically the same conclusions. As to the ultimate nature of things man knows nothing and can know nothing; strict scientists do not even yet see their way toward any such generalizations concerning phenomenal mind as they have framed concerning phenomenal matter; but it is open to them to believe, as Dr. Saleeby affirms he *does* believe, that the unknowable reality of which consciousness is the fleeting manifestation is also eternal and changeless, however inexpressible and unthinkable such reality may be. In the end, he sums up, whatever theory serves as a basis for fine action justifies itself.

The scientific spirit of the nineteenth century has led man to climb up the ladder of his own imagination, to seize upon his cloudy dreamland and to dissect it. Having made an eternity of bliss, he has begun to analyze it and to question whether, even if it were possible to prove it, it would be desirable. A form of consciousness unattached to an organism is hard to conceive; a form of consciousness worthy of unbroken and unending continuity is unthinkable, and only by metaphysical shifts can the mind face the idea. Dr. Saleeby can give us no further solace from his evolutionary doctrine than that change is inevitable, and that whatever is fittest to environment will survive. That the survival of the fittest need not necessarily mean survival of the best and highest is obvious. "The conditions may be such that mercy, justice and genius cannot survive under them, while brutality, fraud and convention can." This alone lies in the keeping of man. Maeterlinck to the contrary, we cannot foresee an era when man shall steer his planet at will through the spheres, but in the realm of spiritual destiny and of social environment each will tell, however little. The drift of the tide is indifferent to man's welfare, and only by definite and deliberate effort shall we create an environment in which the noblest hearts shall not be shattered and mutilated.

So that if, on the one hand, prolonged and elaborated speculation seems futile, a myopic indifference to the future, on the

* Saleeby, "Evolution, The Master-key." Harper & Brothers, 1906.

other, means the lowering of standards and the deterioration of environment for future generations. Indeed, it is by means of what seems at times futile reflection that we come at any sense of proportionate values.

So we run up against one of the endless paradoxes of life—that, as the value of the moment depends upon the sense of eternity, so eternity itself seems to be compact of the quality of the fleeting moments.

The real beauty of the scientific standpoint—its refusal to juggle with facts and its demand that the soul, instead of yearning into the dim inane, shall give the highest quality to the moment as it passes—comes out in Professor Münsterberg's* graceful monologue, "The Eternal Life." Extension in time, he points out, is after all no more to be desired than extension in space; and the quality of the soul of a man would be no finer if he stretched up to the moon and across to the ends of the earth. Personality is not *in* time nor *of* it. Itself is creator of both time and space and places objects therein, but itself remains free. To question how long the soul endures, Professor Münsterberg thinks, is like questioning whether the will is round or square, and how many pounds it weighs. Eternity is not duration, but it is the quality of the instant. There is a curious experience known to most men at some period in their lives, when they feel this without being able to give actual account of it—moments when the street before us, for example, with its weighty brick houses, suddenly seems no more than a wavering and indistinct cloudland, utterly lacking in stability and concreteness, or what we call "reality," and when nothing seems actual and lasting but the moral values we have set upon life. In some such sense, it would be quite possible that he who utterly and hopelessly condemns himself should be indeed cast into everlasting darkness, and the quality of that moment of despair be stamped upon its face once and forever.

One point that Professor Münsterberg seems to overlook, in enumerating the reasons men have for desiring immortality, is the longing of most souls to come into completer relations with perfection. They have yearned for God because they have yearned for a fuller being, because they want to know a justice and a charity they themselves could never compass. It is the feeling

* Hugo Münsterberg, "The Eternal Life." Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1905.

that makes Browning insist so strenuously upon the fulfilment of an after-life:

"On earth the broken arc, in heaven the perfect round;"

the feeling so hauntingly present that, cope with life as we will and to the very best of our powers, it yet remains maimed and fragmentary; and the verdict of the staunchest optimist of the Victorian era is true for most men of developed consciousness:

"Howsoever came my fate,
Sorrow did and joy did nowise—life well weighed—preponderate."

The impossibility of conceiving of indefinite duration for so limited a creature as man Professor Münsterberg points out. If he is to live forever, then he must live as something utterly different from his present limited personality.

Just this very fact of the thwarting limitations of this life, of its imperfections and half-development, is the greatest proof of future fulfilment to writers like Mr. Crothers,* who, in his "The Endless Life," again reiterates that the only continuance conceivable to man is spiritual development, wholly divorced from monotonous and endless repetition. To the critically trained mind, historical evidence is too weak to lean upon. The attempts of psychical research to assure us of the lingering about of our dead, their undignified attempts to establish their identity by locating gold-headed canes and repeating trite secrets, are both disheartening and disillusioning. If this were the form of future existence, "dust to dust" and an end of all would be infinitely more consoling. Once again the weight of evidence is simply that, as man becomes more and more alert to the divine issues of the present life, more and more can he afford to throw himself trustfully upon the things which do not yet appear.

As for Dr. Osler's† contribution to the subject, it has only the value of one more testimony that the whole question of immortality lies outside the domain of science, and that the scientific method is likely ever to stand paralyzed by the magnificent assumptions of faith. Dr. Osler's argument that man cares very little about immortality, as evidenced by his own notes taken at

* Samuel McChord Crothers, "The Endless Life." Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1905.

† William Osler, M.D., "Science and Immortality." Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1905.

five hundred different death-beds, is neither weighty nor illuminating. In a large number of deaths resulting from age, weakness, or prolonged sickness, there is apt to come before the end a noticeable mood of detachment, and with it a great secretiveness or self-sufficiency. A curious and delicate observer may note this mood over and over again—a certain drawing into itself of the soul's interests and an inability and unwillingness to give out its preoccupations. These would probably have been the cases labelled by Dr. Osler "indifferent and unconscious." To say, too, as Dr. Osler does, that men are not interested in immortality, because they do not buttonhole their neighbors and talk about it in the street, is puerile and inadequate. We do not buttonhole our neighbors to talk about the recent death of our only son, or our most exultant and absorbing love-affair, but that is no proof that we do not care. Indeed, it seems to be a part of the law of the ultimate isolation of the soul that its deepest interests are held concealed and protected from other men. Again, Dr. Osler uses these terms: "If we believed in the immortality of the soul, and that the status of souls in all eternity depended on their belief at the moment when they are called to their account;" but these are two utterly separate convictions, in no wise necessarily linked together, and, as a matter of fact, rarely enough so in life. In the end, Dr. Osler admits the twofold nature of man, grants the heart its own claim, and ends with an allusion to the suspended judgment of the greatest of idealists.

Ostwald's "Individuality and Immortality"* attempts to offer no other immortality than the racial instinct, the desire to complete our lives in our children and our children's children, or in our self-sacrificing works for the good of humanity. That such a motive can appeal only to the highly developed consciousness is very evident. We could hardly console Johnnie for his own cut finger by saying: "Don't cry; see, Elizabeth's finger is perfectly sound and well!" and when the creature is going through the slow torture which wins a higher consciousness from him, nothing, absolutely nothing, consoles, but the definite conviction that that fuller and richer consciousness is to be born, and that all works toward one "far-off divine event."

* "Individuality and Immortality," by Wilhelm Ostwald, Professor of Physical Chemistry at the University of Leipzig, Temporary Professor of Harvard College. Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1906.

One point of interest in all this speculation, and one that actually rises to the mind as we consider our desire for personal continuation, is the fact that in this life all higher forms of happiness are connected with a distinct sense of the loss of personality. That virtue consists largely in the "heart at leisure from itself," that the most fortunate endowment of genius is the impersonal intellect and a free and wide-roving curiosity, goes without saying. But, also, the rapture and the ecstasy of love are simply the joyous laying aside of one's own life for another's. The bliss of motherhood expresses the same craving of human nature for self-surrender; and, finally, and in its highest form, the experience of all the saints and martyrs, all the soldiers in great causes, all the free lances fighting for an ideal, is an experience of the laying aside of the personal will and yielding to the desire to obey an outer and a self-relieving command.

A work of great speculative interest is Edward Carpenter's "*Art of Creation*."* His method and his matter do not belong strictly to the scientific field; but his unhesitating assertions of the powers of the self are in a high degree suggestive and exhilarating. It seems fairly true that man is only beginning to realize his power over nature and its agencies, and the developments of the last century point toward the fact that he may do much to extend his creative and controlling powers. "The brain and self-consciousness," says Carpenter, "are mere midwives attending the great birth of the soul. The brain must cease its terrified and insatiate quest, and man must learn to glide below it into the quiet feeling of his own identity with the self of all things." Thus his consciousness deepens to that of universal life, where there are no divided interests, rivalries and re-criminations cease, and their place is taken by a profound and intense realization of the unity and common life of all races and creatures. Then the individual is no longer "under the domination of the body and its heredity; but, rising out of the tomb, becomes lord and master of the body's powers and identified with the immortal self of the world." This is the ultimate deliverance from self which brings to birth complete joy in the here and now.

* "*The Art of Creation; Essays on the Self and its Powers*," by Edward Carpenter. New York, The Macmillan Co.; London, George Allen. 1905.

"Only after long experience does the sense of our true identity come to us. And, as the civilized man who has learned what reflection is, can now see his face almost where he will—in pools and rivers and polished surfaces . . . so our true identity once having been learned, our relation to our body having been completed, we shall find the magic of one particular body is no longer necessary, since out of the great ocean of nature we can pick up our own reflection (or make to ourselves a body of some kind) practically anywhere."

Modern speculation seems to emphasize one point quite unanimously, namely: that such immortality as there is to be gained is not come at easily; that, whether in the body or out of the body, many deaths must be died and the self must give up the self more times than one. Indeed, scientists and metaphysicians alike admit that:

"He who flagged not in the earthly strife,
From strength to strength advancing, only he,
His soul well knit and all his battles won,
Mounts, and that hardly, to eternal life."

LOUISE COLLIER WILLCOX.